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GENUINE SPIRITUALITY: A STUDY OF 1 CORINTHIANS
 #31

CHRISTIANITY'S CENTRAL CONFESSION: JESUS IS LORD
1 CORINTHIANS 12:1-3

INTRODUCTION

Before we take up the issue at hand in 1 Corinthians 12, we must remember that Paul is responding to questions which the church had posed to him in a letter [1 Corinthians 7:1]. These questions covered such issues as marriage and divorce, attending worship feasts at pagan temples, eating the meat that had been sacrificed to idols and the roles of men and women in public worship. It is public worship that had Paul's attention in chapters 11-14. In chapter 12, Paul begins to address the topic of spiritual gifts—*extraordinary manifestations of divine power* (Hodge). God manifests His grace gifts in strange places and through strange people. The Corinthians were not a mature bunch, yet Paul wrote to them: *4I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus, 5that in everything you were enriched in Him, in all speech and all knowledge, 6even as the testimony concerning Christ was confirmed in you, 7so that you are not lacking in any gift, awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, 8who will also confirm you to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ* (1 Corinthians 1:4-7).

We will learn more about the Corinthians' excesses, but whatever their problems surrounding spiritual gifts, it was not lack. In the book of Acts, God pours down His Spirit upon His Church. The effect of this was new and vigorous spiritual life and numerous divine manifestations. The natural tendency of immature believers with exceptional gifts was to make a mess of the whole thing; this was the case in Corinth. Corinth experienced a disorderly excess in public worship that resulted from genuine spiritual power in the hands of children. These were true Christians who needed to be guided by an orderly (14:40) love (13:1-13).

THE REAL QUESTION OF 1 CORINTHIANS 12:1-3 WAS: WHAT DEFINES TRUE SPIRITUALITY?

The Corinthians were spiritually alive; they had been filled by the Holy Spirit. The result was the manifestation of numerous spiritual gifts which Paul will identify in verses 4-11. Some of these gifts dominated their public gatherings; speaking and interpreting tongues, prophesying and words of knowledge, among other gifts. It seems that this caused some concern within the church. One group felt that such gifts identified true, mature Christians; spiritually mature believers. They no doubt looked down on those who did not possess such extraordinary gifts. The other group was skeptical of such miraculous gifts. Perhaps they were skeptical because those gifts reminded them of their former lives outside of Christ and in pagan worship. It was there in pagan worship that such extraordinary demonstrations of the "miraculous" led them *astray* from the truth. They witnessed certain extraordinary events at the pagan festivals and were influenced to worship *mute idols* (v2). It appears that what was happening in the Corinthian Church brought back bad memories for those from pagan backgrounds and they wanted such

extraordinary displays to cease. They did not see these gifts as evidence of genuine Christianity or spiritual maturity.

A lot of accusation and speculation surrounded this issue and the Corinthians were largely *unaware* (v1) of the truth concerning the Holy Spirit and how He gifts the body of Christ. Therefore Paul must help both groups to embrace the Spirit, His gifts and one another.

SO, WHICH GROUP IS RIGHT, THOSE WHO EMBRACE THESE EXTRAORDINARY MANIFESTATIONS OR THOSE WHO ARE SKEPTICAL OF THEM?

So, which group is right? Which faction truly possesses the Holy Spirit? Obviously, neither is completely right. The problem is that they are defining mature spirituality by the wrong standard. You see, God's gifts are given sovereignly; He gifts whom He pleases however He pleases and we do not stand as His judge. Paul will make this point as he writes, *18But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired (1 Corinthians 12:18)*. God places us where He wants us to be within His Church and He gifts us accordingly. Therefore, because I have a certain gift, it does not mean I am spiritually mature. And if I lack a certain gift, it does not mean I am spiritually immature.

God's spiritual gifting comes to those who are badly in need of learning to demonstrate true spiritual fruit. Spiritual fruit [love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control] takes time, effort and perseverance to develop. Spirit gifts come whenever God sovereignly chooses to bestow them. The Corinthians were all gifted in one form or the other, and they were all immature to one degree or the other. Therefore, they are using a false standard to define genuine, mature spirituality. So, who has the Holy Spirit?

PAUL BRINGS THE CORINTHIANS BACK TO THE MOST BASIC CHARACTERISTIC OF GENUINE CHRISTIANITY AND SPIRITUAL MATURITY: THE CONFESSION THAT JESUS IS LORD.

Paul simplifies the matter greatly for the Corinthians in answering this question. He simply says that whoever confesses that Jesus is Lord is able to do so because he possesses the Holy Spirit. In other words, Paul makes the issue of spiritual maturity about Jesus rather than about possessing one gift over another. What essentially defines one who has the Spirit? He confesses that Jesus is Lord (v3). Those without the Spirit would see Jesus as a troublemaker justly condemned to death on a cross. They would see Him as having brought about His own death by foolishly challenging the spiritual and religious authorities of His day. The Apostle Paul reminds the Corinthians that no man makes these statements under the influence of the Holy Spirit. A blind man, under the influence of Satanic unbelief makes these kinds of statements. *2 Corinthians 4:3-4, 3And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, 4in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.*

For the moment, Paul leaves the secondary issue of the Holy Spirit's work of gifting God's children and he points to the Spirit's primary work of convincing us that Jesus is Lord in such a way that we confess Him and worship Him all of our lives. Genuine Christianity cannot be defined by speaking in tongues, prophesying or some other fantastic episode; it must be defined by one great confession: Jesus is Lord and only the Spirit can enable such a confession from the heart of a sinner.

Obviously, anyone can mouth the words *Jesus is Lord*, but that is not what Paul has in mind. It is only by the Spirit's power that a hell-bent, hardened sinner can come to the place that he confesses this truth with his mouth and his life. In other words, this confession defines both who Jesus is and who He is in relationship to that believing sinner.

To say that Jesus is Lord is to ascribe to Jesus a title that no other holds. He is not only King and Lord, but He is King of kings and Lord of lords. It is the exclusivity of this claim that shocked the first century world and the aftershocks continue today. He alone must be confessed as the ruling Lord. Jesus is Lord was the central confession of the early church. One was identified as a believer upon embracing the Lordship of Jesus. These three words, *Jesus is Lord* place him equal with His Father and superior to every created thing.

This confession teaches us a few truths about Jesus. To say that He is Lord is to ascribe to Him deity. Luke 2:8-11, *8In the same region there were some shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night. 9And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened. 10But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; 11for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.* The eternal Lord took on the nature of a man.

To say that Jesus is Lord is to recognize that He is a man who lived, died, arose and is now in an exalted position. Dead criminals are not called lords. This most basic confession recognizes that God became a man, lived a sinless life, died in the place of sinners, arose from the dead and now reigns over all creation. Acts 2:32-36, *32"Thus Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses. 33"Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear. 34"For it was not David who ascended into heaven, but he himself says: THE LORD SAID TO MY LORD, "SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND, 35UNTIL I MAKE YOUR ENEMIES A FOOTSTOOL FOR YOUR FEET." 36"Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ--this Jesus whom you crucified."*

To say that Jesus is Lord is to declare that He alone is to be worshipped. He is not simply and objectively Lord over all other authorities and powers; He is rightfully my Lord. He alone has the right to guide my life. I never have the right to oppose Him or disobey Him. This means that a true confession of Jesus' Lordship affects how I live. It affects who I date or marry. It affects how I do my job. It affects how I relate to my friends and my enemies. Jesus' Lordship touches every corner of my life.

CONCLUSION

Like the Corinthians, it is easy to be drawn to the dramatic and sensational. It is not difficult to falsely define genuine spirituality by some notable giftedness rather than by the Spirit's most essential work: the transformation of the sinner's heart to enable him to say *Jesus is Lord*. But today, let us return to that primary work of the Spirit and in future weeks, Lord willing, we will study those secondary motions of the Spirit.

For 2000 years the central confession of Jesus' Church is that He is Lord. No true Christian denies this and no false one truly embraces it with all its implications. So, in everything we do as a local congregation we want to show forth the Lordship of Jesus. Our songs, prayers and sermons must make this theme readily apparent to the most distracted observer. Our Sunday School, home

groups and deacon ministries must proclaim that Jesus is Lord. Additionally, all who enter into this local congregation do so by making one great confession, Jesus is Lord. They do this through their baptism. For at baptism, Jesus is proclaimed as Lord both objectively and subjectively. Objectively, the very motions of immersion remind us that He was buried, but arose again as the Lord over death, hell and the grave. Subjectively, the motions of immersion remind us that we die to all other lords that used to possess us and we have been raised to walk under the gracious authority of our new Lord Jesus. At our baptism, we not only commit ourselves to Jesus as unsaved, lost, helpless, trusting that He alone has saved us, but we also renounce all other gods and lords who demand our obedience.

We gladly baptize those who make this glorious confession their own personal confession. It must be personal, *if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; 10for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. (Romans 10:9-10)*. We are saved by grace alone through faith alone. Salvation comes by faith in Christ as Lord. Paul is pointing to Jesus and declaring that the center of all Christianity is the confession that Jesus is Lord. Christianity is not trying to follow the teachings of Jesus as one would try to follow the teachings of Buddha or some other man. Christianity is believing and confessing that Jesus is Lord over all. It is believing that God took on flesh, lived a perfect life, died on the cross to absorb His own wrath and arose again to prove that His reigns over all, even death. Paul sees saving faith as something that will be expressed through open confession, but he is not adding public confession as an addition to faith. The New Testament has always taught that public confession of saving faith is good. This is why Jesus set up baptism. It is the opportunity to externally express the internal faith we possess, but it is not essential for salvation. Neither is walking an aisle or any other public act. We are saved through faith in Christ alone.